

How to “Wow” and “Delight” Patients So They Become Your Biggest Fans

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Getting patients in the door is just the start...

Your patients are more than that; they also have the potential to be your biggest “fans” and your best “brand ambassadors.” And at first blush, it may seem the biggest challenge is getting the patient through the door. However, at this moment, the “real work” begins. Just as you do not want a rotating door of staff, you cannot afford to have a rotating door of patients. In our universe, such unfavourable patient turnover is called “patient churn.” Put a pin in it (more on than later).

So, how do you “wow” the new patient? How do you get them to keep coming back, and moreover, how do you get them to sing your praises to everyone in their universe?

The first visit...the first impression

Consider the last time that you intentionally reviewed or updated services and approaches to the delivery of service as it relates to the initial visit and initial engagement with new patients. After all,

you are not simply selling a widget here. You are selling an *experience*. This experience can make or break not “just” the patient’s perception of your practice and team. More importantly, you are shaping the patient’s *perception of modern dentistry*. No pressure, though!

The all-important first appointment is a “tone-setter;” it establishes a firm foundation for the relationship between the new patient and your team. Furthermore, it offers the promise of better or sustained health and well-being. It is important to regularly re-review and ensure that every touchpoint associated with the initial visit aligns with your culture and mission and supports a comfortable and pleasant experience.

A few pointers:

- Carefully consider your “welcome” materials. Select some higher-value, positive, and proactive items or products to include with educational information about your practice, services, and dentistry. These items could consist of a toothbrush, samples of toothpaste, floss, and antibacterial rinses.
- Go beyond generic “welcome” materials. By soliciting the likes of intake forms electronically and before the initial visit, you can build a “Meet the Team” goodie bag personalized to the patient’s unique needs. For instance, when going over the items in the bag before the patient leaves, you can point out the addition of sample floss threaders or interdental picks. You can even demonstrate how to use the threader, which further engages the patient. These personalized items may be based on knowing things like, “This patient has a bridge. Maybe she is struggling with cleaning underneath the bridge. A threader can help to make cleaning easier and to promote the life of the bridge.”
- At every step in the process, you and your team should be mindful of potentially “triggering” terms, products, or tools. One should not dwell on pain, blood, needles, or other sources of dental fear and anxiety, especially if you know or sense that the patient has had negative experiences with dentistry in childhood and into adulthood. Balance this consideration with *transparency*, which is essential to building the trust that endears the patient to you, and that results in patients who refer your office to their friends and family. You should, of course, solicit information about their concerns and address them head-on; however, be careful in answering questions related to discomfort. The *language you use matters* here.
- Revisit how the team should answer phones and greet visitors routinely. Ensure the welcome and communication are consistent, wholly inviting, and warm. Seemingly small details, such as repeating patients’ names when conversing with them, helps to instill comfort. Patients feel heard. After all, a name is such an essential part of one’s *identity*. Just

be sure that everyone knows how to pronounce said name properly! Otherwise, good intentions can backfire.

Mind the “lifecycle”... Do not let satisfied patients wither on the vine

Even if the patient was visiting you for a basic recall appointment (and no problems were found), it goes a long way to endear the patient by having a team member follow up to see if there were any lingering questions or if anything else was needed. Another conversation starter is to confirm or make sure that they are on the calendar for their next 6-month hygiene visit.

Also, it is a [best practice](#) for your practice to get patients on the calendar *before they leave the office*. We are all busy. Even if patients do not have their calendars in front of them, this practice assures time has been set aside for a future visit. The essential recall visit does not take a back seat to the myriad of other commitments competing for patients’ time. When patients double-check that the time and date are doable, they can reach out to confirm or, better yet, you can call back later and confirm the time with them well in advance of the slated appointment. That way, no one falls behind on their recall appointments, and you stay ahead of the game and on top of things, which looks good through the eyes of the patient and is in the best interests of patients’ overall health!

Celebrate and honour your patients ... Do not take them for granted!

Once you have developed a certain rapport, it is easy to say, “I don’t have to ‘incentivize’ Ms. Jones anymore. She likes my work so much, and even her family is treated here now.” “Incentivizing” does not mean you have to offer a discount or “freebie” to “entice.” It is nice to be acknowledged. Many of us love to get snail mail. Otherwise, the only mail through the post is typically limited to credit card offers and bills. So, it certainly does not hurt to send a nice, hand-signed note on patient birthdays.

Better yet, why not send a nice note on the anniversary of their first appointment? Or to coincide with other notable dental-related milestones? Dentistry has a unique power; it can be quite personal because individuals are very sensitive about the appearance of their smiles. So much of how we feel about ourselves is wrapped up in the aesthetics of this central facial feature. What better way to make valued, quality patients smile than to send a card on the first anniversary of their big smile makeover? For many individuals, this day may mark the time when they felt born again, with a renewed sense of self, as if they had a second chance at life because their smile was given a second chance.

Fight the “churn”

The above suggestions to present some of the ways to actively minimize [patient churn](#); however, it is equally important to understand “why” churning is occurring, even at a modest rate. Now, to understand the pain points associated with your practice on this front is to have a process in place to measure and track patient feedback. Such tracking need not be costly or unnecessarily onerous or sophisticated. Rather, a simple process in place to solicit comments about how a patient’s most recent visit went is more than sufficient. The idea here is to have some method that acknowledges and values patients’ insights.

It is also important to note that the sources of dreaded patient churn are not always due to a lack of “soft skills” or even dissatisfaction with your practice. It could come down to a *lack of access to your services*. You may need to revisit some fundamentals, such as your office hours. Consider demographics. Are your hours conducive to the “average patient” in your market? If not, you may need to take a real, hard look at offering evening and weekend hours as needed. Whatever you do though, avoid over-scheduling, as that can damage churn and loyalty, too. Patients should never feel that you are stretched too thin – schedule for the talent that you have at present. As desired and feasible, it may be time and make sense to consider additional hires. Ensure the market and patient demand supports this investment in additional talent.

Patient delight

It pays to “borrow” best practices from other industries; notably, hospitality is all about “wowing” their guests. In fact, hotel giant Marriott is often considered an innovator in creating “[customer delight](#).” Think like a hotelier. Are you ticking off the boxes that represent each patient’s needs and wants?

With hotel brands, the personalized experience might come down to asking if the guest likes soft or firm pillows and then delivering on the preference or answer to that query. With dental practices, the personalized experience might come down to asking, “What can we do to make you more comfortable? Do you want the TV or music on in the treatment room? What music might help? Do you have a favourite TV programme? Would you like some tea while you wait? Or do you prefer another beverage?”

As a dental practice, this approach to personalizing the experience furthermore acknowledges prevalent dental fear and anxiety and does something about it! Make a note of any preferences so you have everything the patient wants for their next visit without having to ask again, which delights the patient – you remember the details. Your “guest” feels valued and heard.

About the Author



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